

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H. R. 3307

FOR

THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION, AND PUBLIC LANDS, COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES

Submitted by

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STATEMENT BY KENNETH H. P'POOL, DEPUTY STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER, MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY, IN SUPPORT OF **H. R. 3307** TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO ACQUIRE THE PROPERTY KNOWN AS PEMBERTON'S HEADQUARTERS AND TO MODIFY THE BOUNDARY OF THE VICKSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY PARK TO INCLUDE THAT PROPERTY, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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MR. CHAIRMAN AND DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION, AND PUBLIC LANDS:

I am Kenneth H. P'Pool, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer for Mississippi and Director of the Historic Preservation Division of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to present testimony to you in support of H. R. 3307, to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to acquire the property known as Pemberton's Headquarters and to modify the boundary of the Vicksburg National Military Park to include that property.

Although our country is blessed with many places of great historic value, those associated with the Civil War speak most profoundly and eloquently to the struggles that shaped our American democracy and transformed our diverse states and peoples into a cohesive union. As author Robert Penn Warren wrote, "America became a nation only with the Civil War." No Civil War sites tell the stories of valor, commitment, and sacrifice exhibited by Northerners and Southerners, blacks and whites, during that conflict better than those associated with the Vicksburg Campaign.

Early in the war, Abraham Lincoln recognized Vicksburg, the "Gibraltar of the Confederacy," as "the key" to controlling the Mississippi River and severing the Confederacy in half. As the Vicksburg Campaign developed, it resulted in a regional operation involving major military actions in Tennessee, Arkansas, and Louisiana, as well as Mississippi.

During the winter of 1862-63, Union commander Major Gen. Ulysses S. Grant conducted a series of amphibious operations, referred to as Bayou Expeditions, against Vicksburg, but all failed. Finding it impossible to approach Vicksburg through the bayous of the Mississippi Delta, in the spring of 1863, Grant embarked upon a bold and risky strategy to march his army of 45,000 men down the Louisiana side of the Mississippi, cross the river below Vicksburg, and attack the city from the south. Repulsed by the Confederate forts at Grand Gulf in his first attempt to cross, Grant undauntedly marched his troops further south and stormed across the river at Bruinsburg. Rapidly advancing on a 200-mile-long triangular route (first northeastward then westward), along sunken roads, over rugged terrain, and through dense forest and farmlands, Grant engaged and decisively defeated the Confederates in fierce battles near Port Gibson on May 1, 1863, Raymond on May 12, Jackson (the state capital) on May 14, Champion Hill on May 16, and Big Black River Bridge on May 17. After two failed attempts to take "fortress Vicksburg" by storm, Grant laid siege to the city for six weeks. Cut off from supplies and reinforcements and pounded mercilessly by Union land batteries and gunboats, Confederate commander Lt. Gen. John C. Pemberton was forced to surrender Vicksburg on July 4, 1863.

Grant's Vicksburg Campaign is believed by many historians to be the most decisive of the Civil War and, perhaps, the most brilliant offensive campaign ever undertaken in North America. It was also the most complex combined operation ever attempted by American armed forces prior to World War II. The loss of Vicksburg, perhaps more than any other single event of the war, spelled doom for the Confederacy.

Pemberton's Headquarters, also known as the Willis-Cowan House, is a two-story Classical-Revival mansion located in the heart of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Constructed in the 1830s, the house was used during the 1863 Siege of Vicksburg as the headquarters of Confederate Lt. Gen. John C. Pemberton. It was from this building that Pemberton directed the doomed defense of Vicksburg, and here also on July 3, 1863, that he held a council of war with his subordinates to

discuss plans for surrendering the city to General Grant. On the next day, Pemberton's army, which had managed to defend Vicksburg through forty-seven days of bloody siege, solemnly surrendered. Grant's success in capturing the "Gibraltar of the Confederacy" ended the dramatic Vicksburg Campaign, securing the Mississippi River for the Union and splitting the Confederacy in half. As historian Bruce Catton noted, the loss of Vicksburg was "a mortal wound to the Confederacy."

Pemberton's Headquarters is situated in an area of the city that suffered severely under the relentless Union siege bombardment. Its acquisition for inclusion in the Vicksburg National Military Park would add a greater dimension to the interpretation and understanding of what was perhaps the most horrific siege ever inflicted upon an American city. In planning for creation of the Vicksburg National Military Park in the 1890s, it was the desire and recommendation of both Union and Confederate veterans of the Siege of Vicksburg that the headquarters of both commanders be included in the park. While Grant's headquarters site was included in the confines of the park as established in 1899, Pemberton's Headquarters was at the time in private ownership and unavailable for public acquisition. Because the current property owner is a willing seller, however, we now have the opportunity to fully interpret the Siege of Vicksburg as originally envisioned by the veterans of the conflict.

In 1976, Pemberton's Headquarters was designated a National Historic Landmark, primarily for its important role in the Siege of Vicksburg. However, the building is believed to have also been used by Union officers during their subsequent occupation of the city, as they did other adjacent and nearby structures. For example, Pemberton's Headquarters is located next door to the Balfour House, which served as Major Gen. James B. McPherson's headquarters during the Union occupation of Vicksburg. Across the street from Pemberton's Headquarters is the former Sisters of Mercy Convent, which was also converted to military use after the surrender of the city. The Sister's of Mercy are renowned for having organized one of Mississippi's first schools for the education of African Americans. The historic Warren County Courthouse, where the military administration of the occupied city was conducted throughout the period of Reconstruction, is only four blocks away, as is also the site of the 1865 to 1869 state headquarters of the Bureau of Freedmen's Affairs.

In 1990, PL 101-442 charged the Vicksburg Military Park "...to interpret the campaign and siege of Vicksburg from April 1862 to July 4, 1863, and the history of Vicksburg under Union occupation during the Civil War and Reconstruction." Located within one of Vicksburg's most historic districts and adjacent to the command center of the Union occupation of the city, Pemberton's Headquarters is ideally situated for the Park to address both the siege and occupation aspects of this expanded interpretive mandate, as well as to interpret the significant roles played by African Americans during the Vicksburg Campaign and the period of Reconstruction.

Finally, the inclusion of Pemberton's Headquarters in the Vicksburg National Military Park would provide a mechanism for attracting more of the approximately one million battlefield visitors annually from the park on the edge of town into Vicksburg's historic downtown districts. The economic benefits of increased tourism to the downtown area would be tremendous, as many visitors would no doubt enjoy the many museums, tour homes, bed-and-breakfast accommodations, shops, restaurants and other amenities that are within easy walking distance of Pemberton's Headquarters.

Linkage between the Vicksburg National Military Park and Vicksburg's historic downtown has been cited as vital to the city's economy by several economic impact studies, and is strongly supported by local leaders, including the present mayor, the Honorable Laurence Leyens, and his predecessor, the Honorable Robert Walker, the city's first African American mayor. Acquisition of Pemberton's Headquarters by the Vicksburg National Military Park would establish a National Park Service presence in downtown Vicksburg, which would further enhance the park's role as a good citizen of Vicksburg and Warren County.

For these reasons, I am happy to support H. R. 3307, which will authorize acquisition and incorporation of Pemberton's Headquarters into the Vicksburg National Military Park. Passage of this bill will provide further protection and interpretation for one of America's most important historic places.

Therefore, I respectfully request that the Subcommittee recommend authorization of H. R. 3307

Thank you.

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